

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The Office Action mailed March 8, 2005 has been carefully considered. Reconsideration in view of the following remarks is respectfully requested.

Upon entry of this amendment, claims 1-12 are pending.

Claims 1-12 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as allegedly being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention.

Claims 1-3 and 7-9 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by Kuno et al EP 452041.

The Examiner is thanked for indicating that Claims 4-6 and 10-12 would be allowable if rewritten to overcome the rejections set forth in this Office Action and to include all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Declaration

With this response a new declaration in compliance with CFR §1.67(a) is presented.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 112, Second Paragraph

Claim 1 has been amended to overcome this rejection. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the § 112 rejections of claims 1-12 be withdrawn.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 102(b)

On page 3 of the Office Action, claims 1-3 and 7-9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by the European patent application EP 452041 to Kuno et al. The Examiner noted that the structures and teachings shown in Figs. 3 and 12 appear to define

elements like these claimed. For the following reasons, Applicant respectfully disagrees with the rejections.

Kuno et al disclose a mask hand (or gripper) 2 for gripping a mask. The gripper 2 comprises two fingers 21, each rotatable on a corresponding projecting pin 19. Each finger 21 has a pawl 22 mounted to an end of the finger for gripping the mask 1. The gripper 2 further comprises a center attracting means 28.

Applicant's clamping element as claimed in amended claim 1 comprises "*a first and a second leg having a first and second clamping jaw, respectively, for clamping a substrate, each of the two clamping jaws comprising a clamping plate deflectable in a predefined direction relative to the corresponding leg*". The first and second leg correspond to the two fingers 21 and the clamping jaws have the same function as the pawls of Kuno, namely to grip the object. But here the similarities end. The pawls of Kuno are rigid elements that are not detachable relative to the fingers. If the gripped object, here the mask 1, comes up against an obstacle, the mask 1 is moved relative to the pawls or glides along the pawls, the center attracting means 28 receives a force and is moved in a direction away from the mask 1 such that the free end of a supporting rod 28C flexes a leaf spring 26. This flexure is measured by a strain gauge 27.

Kuno presents a complicated solution for detecting if the gripped object comes against an obstacle. Kuno does not disclose or suggest that the detecting mechanism could be integrated directly into the clamping jaws. As a deflection of the pawls relative to the corresponding finger is not foreseen there is consequently no sensor for measuring such a deflection.

The pawls look something like a rod bent by 90° at its ends and stuck into the finger 21. During gripping the pawl engages into a nut of the mask frame 31. The rod is a rigid piece of material, therefore the pawl cannot and does not deflect.

It can be said that with the clamping element as claimed in amended claim 1 the pawls of Kuno are replaced by a clamping plate mounted deflectably on the respective leg. As claimed in claim 2, the clamping plate is connected via two bridges to a fixing plate secured to the leg. These bridges behave like a leaf spring and thus enable the deflection of the clamping plate relative to the leg. This differs substantially from the cited art.

As Kuno does not teach and does not suggest the integration of a mechanism for the detection of the clamped object coming against an obstacle into the clamping jaw, Kuno does not anticipate claims 1-12, and for the same reasons does not render the claimed invention obvious. Therefore the Examiner's rejection of Applicant's claims should be withdrawn and the claims allowed.

In view of the foregoing it is respectfully asserted that the claims are now in condition for allowance.


Request for Allowance

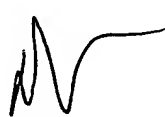
As each of the Examiner's rejections have been addressed herein, early favorable consideration of this response is earnestly solicited and Applicants request that the Examiner enters this response and passes claims 1-12 to issue.

Applicant respectfully requests that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case. Please charge any additional required fee or credit any overpayment not otherwise paid or credited to our deposit account No. 50-1698.

Respectfully submitted,

THELEN REID & PRIEST, LLP

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David B. Ritchie
Reg. No. 31,562

Thelen Reid & Priest LLP
P.O. Box 640640
San Jose, CA 95164-0640
Tel. (408) 292-5800
Fax. (408) 287-8040